



John L. Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR JEFF WRIGHT

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

March 31, 2008

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM in the Helen Nelson Room of the Newington Town Hall.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present:

Councilor Banach
Councilor Boni
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Bowen
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nagel
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Staff Present:

John L. Salomone, Town Manager
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant
Ann Harter, Finance Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA - none

IV CONSIDERATION OF NEW BUSINESS

A Capital Improvement Plan/Five Year Plan

Town Manager Salomone gave an overview of the Town's long range Capital Improvement Plan:

- Proposal discussed at the CIP subcommittee meeting on Thursday, March 27. After the meeting there were various discussions and some suggested adjustments were made in regards to the Capital budget.
- The handout before the Council outlines adjustments to the capital budget and to other parts of the budget.
- CIP adjustments are items 1-15 on the handout. The budget numbers are changed based on the original Town Manager proposal
- The Council, if it desired, will approve the changes as outlined in the Adjustments to Town Manager's Proposed Budget.

- The final sheet of the handout outlines the roads which will be resurfaced or reconstructed under the proposed CIP budget.

Discussion followed. Deputy Mayor Lenares, CIP Committee Chair, commented about the CIP meeting. He stated that almost everything listed in the handout came out of the CIP Committee discussion. He stated that he is impressed with the number of roads that will be repaired under the CIP. Councilor Cohen asked whether the Council will have the opportunity to discuss each item line by line. Mayor Wright replied that there will be an opportunity to comment on each item under agenda section B.

Councilor Bowen asked whether the Council had the CIP recommendations before them. He stated that the CIP Committee made recommendations at their meeting on March 27 and rather than bringing those recommendations of the Committee to the Council, they were changed to something else (comment not audible on the tape). Deputy Mayor replied in the negative stating that the recommendations have been brought to the Council at the present meeting. Councilor Bowen stated that the CIP passed recommendations to the Council on March 27, but the documents currently before the Council do not reflect those recommendations. He stated that there is a \$600,000 change in the roads, a huge change. Councilor Bowen commented that he does not agree or disagree with the changes, but again, this does not reflect what the CIP Committee had recommended. Mayor Wright explained that the changes were made under his direction in concurrence with the Republican caucus. He stated that the documents list the recommendations from the Town Manager, the recommendations of the CIP Committee and the changes that Republicans would like to see made. Councilor Bowen again asked whether the Council has the CIP Committee's recommendations to the Council as passed at the meeting last Thursday. Councilor Bowen stated that the Council is voting on the Mayor's and Republican caucus' version of the CIP. Mayor Wright replied in the affirmative. Councilor Bowen stated that the document is a bit different than anticipated. Mayor Wright agreed and noted that Councilor Bowen was at the CIP Committee meeting and abstained from all of the votes. Councilor Bowen concurred and explained that he abstained because normally the CIP takes recommendations from the Board and the Council and the five voting members of the Committee then vote on the proposed CIP budget. He stated that what actually happened was that without any input from the CIP members the Mayor submitted his CIP proposal to the Committee and the Committee voted on that. He stated that he abstained from the vote due to a change in the procedure, not due to a dollar amount. He stated that he wanted the Chair to agree that what the Council has in its packet is the Mayor's and the Republican Committee's recommendations. Mayor Wright stated that Councilor Bowen's statements are correct and commented that Councilor Bowen also attended the CIP meeting with a list of recommendations. He stated that there were a number of recommendations given by a number of people and the recommendations before the Council are the results of some changes made to recommendations of the CIP Committee. He stated that it would be best to discuss the items line by line, and to address specific concerns at that time. Councilor Bowen stated that he did not attend the CIP meeting with a proposal, rather it was a document containing the entire Board of Education's recommendations and the entire Town's recommendations with no recommendations on his part.

B Set Tentative Budget

Mayor Wright gave an overview of the adjustments of the 2008-2009 Town Manager's proposed budget:

- The proposed mill rate for 2008-2009 would be 27.69
- The amount to be collected in taxes would total \$79,938,738
- The net adjustment collectible grand list would be \$2,561,593,991
- The value of the mill would be \$2,561,594

The Council reviewed the line item adjustments numbered 1-28 on the Adjustments to 2008-2009 Town Manager's Proposed Budget. Line item details and changes in tax burden for each line item are attached.

Deputy Mayor Lenares made the motions for each line item on the Adjustments to 2008-2009 Town Manager's Proposed Budget to be accepted. Councilor Nagel seconded all motions. All items passed - voting results attached.

Discussion – Adjustments to the Adjustments to 2008-2009 Town Manager's Proposed Budget (Items 1-16: CIP):

Item 3 - Decrease Computer System Replacement to \$225,000 (CIP): Councilor Bowen asked Town Manager Salomone if there is a degree of comfort in the reduction of that line item. Town Manager Salomone stated that it will take a little longer to replace some of the equipment. He stated that he could easily spend \$500,000 or \$250,000 but will make do with the \$225,000.

Item 4 – Increase Town Hall Improvements to \$920,000 (CIP): Councilor Cohen stated that in the event of a breakdown of the heating system at the Town Hall the \$920,000 would not be enough (based on current estimates) to actually do the repairs needed and if such repairs are needed the Town would have to look for additional funding. Councilor Bowen stated that it is the first time he has seen the proposed number and asked how it was derived. Mayor Wright replied that the Town had recently received the Kaestle Boos recommendation, which included updates and improvements to the Town Hall totaling over \$16,700,000. He stated that Phase I of the project is to replace the boiler system at a cost of about \$400,000 which was included in the 2007-2008 budget and at the discretion of the Town Manager. Mayor Wright stated that Phase II would be roughly 1.5 million dollars. He stated that there have been many discussions and in the next year there will be many important decisions to make regarding how to proceed. He stated that it was the CIP Committee's direction not to rush into projects in the Town Hall and to consider all repair options before making significant financial investments. He stated that the Town should also look into renewable or green energy sources. He stated that the Town should start reserving funds for improvements, but in the meantime create a Town Hall repair fund to address any problems. He stated that if the problems reach a catastrophic level then the Town will have to make further changes to the budget or the reserves. Councilor Banach inquired whether the Town has a plan to replace the boiler at the Town Hall prior to it breaking down, or whether the plan is to wait for the boiler to fail. Mayor Wright stated that there are already funds put aside from last year's budget to pay for boiler replacement. He stated that Phase II would be distribution system costs, and the money is set aside to make any needed repairs. He stated that if things go well that there will be money in the reserve for future decisions. Councilor Banach repeated his question. Town Manager Salomone replied that there is \$380,000 unspent in the present CIP which will be used to purchase a new boiler. He stated that depending on recommendations the Town will decide whether to start repairing or replacing some of the distribution system. Councilor Banach asked whether the Town Hall will be looking at a new boiler in the next year. Town Manager Salomone replied that at best there is another year or two left in the current boiler and that they will try to replace the boiler during the non-heating season. Mayor Wright stated that the overall number for Town Hall repairs is very large: nearly \$17,000,000. He stated that the Town will need to make decisions as to the direction to go in regards to the Town Hall and stated that the project should go to referendum to let the people decide about the large expenditure. Councilor Bowen stated that the number from the CIP Committee was \$250,000, not \$920,000. He stated concern about the boiler, noting a recommendation by the Facilities Manager that the current steam boiler be replaced by a hot water boiler. He stated that the Town will have no choice in an emergency situation but to buy a steam boiler and hook it up to the old system. Councilor Bowen stated that he has learned that placing a new boiler into an old system will result in additional stress and leaks in the system. He stated concern that in the event of an emergency the Town will have to commit itself to a steam boiler and the strain of a new boiler on an old system. Mayor Wright stated that the recommendation of the CIP Committee was \$245,000. He noted that the Facilities Manager had stated that both options are responsible and viable options. Town Manager Salomone stated that the most desirable option is for hot water distribution. He stated that hot water distribution will be considered as the first option and it will be attempted to be done within the allocated funds.

Item 6 – Increase Road Resurfacing: Councilor Cohen stated that the Town usually pays for roadwork through State grants and that the increase is an additional \$310,000 out of the Town's cash funds rather than waiting for State funds. She requested that the public let the Council know if it would rather have this additional roadwork done through the Town's budget at the cost of \$310,000, or would it be willing to wait until money becomes available from the State in the future to cover the costs. Mayor Wright clarified that the \$310,000 is in addition to the State grants that the Town receives every year. Councilor Cohen agreed and stated that the public should be aware that the money is coming from Town funds rather than State funds. Councilor Bowen stated that the Town's Highway Department had requested \$1,080,000 for roads, a big increase over the \$700,000 appropriated last year. He explained that the Town was unable to spend the full \$700,000 last year due to the State's delays in getting pricing to the Town. He explained that the recommendation is for the Town to take a large grant from the State at \$580,000 and add the unused \$500,000 to total the \$1,080,000 in roads for this year. He noted the Highway Department made a

presentation to the CIP Committee last year and recommended an approximate spending of \$700,000 per year as a prudent way to catch up on previous years in which not as much money was spent on roads. He stated that that additional \$300,000 will bring the total up to \$1,390,000, a big number that uses this year's tax dollars rather than future years' grant money. Councilor Bowen stated that it is an excessive usage of the tax dollars and that he will not support the spending of an extra \$300,000 of the Town's money, especially when the Town recommended that it only wanted \$1,080,000. Mayor Wright stated that the road quality in Town has not been this bad in a number of years, and that the increase recognizes the need to address the roads. He stated that spending the Town's money will not prevent the Town from receiving future money for the roads from the State. He stated that it is a policy decision by the Town Council that the roads are terrible and that it is time to invest in the roads. He stated that 22 Town roads will be reconstructed and/or repaved as a result of this funding.

Item 9 – Eliminate Town Landfill Site Improvements (CIP): Town Manager Salomone commented that the Town will have to spend the money on this item eventually. He stated that a report was just submitted to the State and ultimately the Town will need to make some improvements to the landfill.

Item 10 – Eliminate Parks and Playfield Improvements (CIP): Councilor Banach stated that he would be opposed to the item, as many of the smaller parks are not in great condition and have not been addressed in years. He commented that there has been resurgence in young people using the parks and stated that the more attractive the parks are made the more they will be used. Councilor Bowen agreed with Councilor Banach. He stated that he would prefer that some of the excess roadwork funds should be put towards the parks, which were at one point one of the biggest draws in the Town but have been neglected in past years.

Item 14 – Increase NHS Air Conditioning to \$640,000 for Grant Purposes: Councilor Nasinnyk asked whether the State reimbursement is \$340,000 or \$300,000. Councilor Bowen asked whether the adjustment of \$340,000 is against the \$640,000 to bring the actual cost to the Town to \$300,000. Ann Harter replied that grant amount is \$340,000. Mayor Wright stated that the item does not include just air conditioning, it includes ventilation and climate control systems in the classrooms at the High School and that the system will perform heating, circulation and air conditioning and is replacing the system originally included when the building was constructed in 1971. He stated that the proposed system is far more efficient and will conserve energy.

Discussion – Adjustments to the Adjustments to 2008-2009 Town Manager's Proposed Budget (Items 16-28: Operating Budget Issues):

Item 17 – Increase to Human Services/Rope Program: Mayor Wright stated that the increase reflects the Council's desire to reach out and help the children this year.

Items 20 and 21 – Change Cemetery Personnel from Seasonal to PT: Councilor Cohen noted that both items state "Change Cemetery Personnel from Seasonal to PT" and asked whether one of the lines should read "PT to Seasonal". Ms. Harter stated that while the same explanation was used on both lines, one line is to eliminate the seasonal personnel and move the personnel to part time from seasonal.

Town Manager Salomone stated that the following items are a reflection of the request from the Fire Commission to move their maintenance items, with the exception of utilities, back into their account. Town Manager Salomone stated that the request has been honored this year, but it would ultimately be a good idea to centralize the maintenance of the Fire Department. Councilor Bowen commented that the Town should make sure that issue of Fire Department maintenance is acted upon in accordance with the Charter. Town Manager Salomone agreed.

Item 28 – Decrease Board of Education Budget: Councilor Nasinnyk noted that the proposed decrease of \$200,000 to the Board of Education would mean a percentage tax change to the public of 2.86%, and inquired if a cut of even \$100,000 would meet the 3% tax cap. She also requested that the cut be reduced and also that the amount be split between the Town and the Board of Education so that the burden of the cuts do not fall just on the Board of Education. Councilor Banach expressed concern with the \$200,000 cut and that the cut is not proportionate with the cuts to the Town budget. Councilor Bottalico stated that there were many cuts to the Town side. He stated that a cut of \$200,000 is a drop in the bucket and that he feels the cuts should have been more. Councilor Bowen explained that although it appears that the Town's budget is lower than the Board of Education's budget most of the decrease on the Town's side is attributable to the health benefit insurance decrease, not to any cut. He stated that to a degree the same is true for the

Board of Education, but it is much more so for the Town's budget as the Town had a decrease in insurance costs. Councilor Bowen stated that the cuts in the Board of Education include cuts for books, and remarked that while spending on books was decreased for the Board of Education, spending on books was actually increased for the Library. Councilor Bowen agreed with Councilor Nasinnyk that the decrease should be split between the Town and the Board of Education. Councilor Boni stated that considering that the Board of Education budget was not cut last year, a cut of \$200,000 should be considered a gift for this year. Councilor Bowen stated that the Town's budget was not cut last year either. Mayor Wright stated that the \$200,000 number was derived based on discussions between the Deputy Mayor, the Chairman of the Board of Education and himself. He stated that the Board had planned on purchasing three vehicles this year, including two busses, and it was decided instead to study the cost of transportation over the next year to consider whether it is best to continue operating as is or whether it is more cost effective to privatize school transportation. He stated that since the Town is in the process of studying transportation it would be best not to make those vehicle purchases right now. He stated that the purchases would have exceeded \$200,000 so in effect there are not any cuts; everything that the Board has asked for in its \$2,308,000 increase is being approved, including the addition of two school social workers, with the agreement that the Board would hold off on the purchase of the vehicles. Mayor Wright stated that the Town has treated the Board of Education's budget very fairly. Mayor Wright requested a roll call vote on the item, results as follows:

Councilor Banach: no
Councilor Boni: yes
Councilor Bottalico: yes
Councilor Bowen: no
Councilor Cohen: yes
Councilor Lenares: yes
Councilor Nagel: yes
Councilor Nasinnyk: no
Mayor Wright: yes

Mayor Wright summarized that with the proposed budget the Town will see a mill rate of 27.68 with a net increase to the tax payer of 2.86%. He stated that there will be a public hearing next Monday, April 7 at 7:00pm in the Council Chambers, with a special meeting to make final changes to the budget as seen fit following the public hearing.

V PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA

Neil Forte, 123 Church Street: Mr. Forte stated that he moved to Town eleven years ago to take advantage of the education system. He stated that he has been involved with coaching soccer for many years and always noticed that the parks and playing fields need to be taken care of. He noted that the Town Manager proposed \$650,000 for road resurfacing and the amount passed was \$960,000, and noted that Councilors Banach and Bowen had addressed the need to maintain parks and playfields, and that Councilor Bowen did not like the concept of spending so much on road resurfacing. Mr. Forte stated that \$200,000 was cut from the Board of Education and \$120,000 from parks and playfields and that what he gets out of it as a parent and a taxpayer is that Newington will have a lot of great roads to drive on but that the kids' educational system and the Town's parks and playgrounds are going to suffer. He stated that he'd rather have a few potholes and see the educational system, parks and playgrounds improve.

Steve Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue, Board of Education Member: Mr. Woods thanked the Council for the funds placed in the CIP which will help to move the Town forward. He stated in regards to the \$200,000 cut that he respects the opinion stated by two of the Republican Councilors but noted that for three of the last four years there has been negotiation and cuts made prior to the Board's budget going before the Council for discussion, which is why the Council does not see the big cuts. He stated that in 2006-2007 the Superintendent's requested budget was increased mostly due to benefits and utility cost increases, and the Town Council cut that budget by \$1,263,000. He stated that the other three years, including last year, the Council did cut the Board's budget. Mr. Woods stated that he would gladly talk to the Council and provide any information necessary to replace the \$200,000 back into the Board's budget.

VI REMARKS BY COUNCILORS

Councilor Cohen stated that the Council will approve the five-year Capital Improvement Plan with the provision that the Council is actually committing to the first year of the five years only with the remaining four years being

negotiable. She noted pages 18, 19 and 21 of the proposed CIP plan that there is nothing that commits to improvement at the Town Hall, however there is bonding for educational and parks and recreations improvement. Councilor Cohen requested that for the remaining budget years when there is a holding line for bonding not to have an item attached to it rather than having an item that has not been discussed. Mayor Wright noted that the document is a work in progress and all agree that decisions will have to be made for future years to address various needs.

VII ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Boni moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:08pm. Motion seconded by Deputy Mayor Lenares. Motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mrs. Jaime Trevethan
Clerk of the Council